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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 000754

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR (DICARLO), EUR/SCE (HOH/FOOKS); NSC FOR
BRAUN

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SUBJECT: BOSNIA - AMBASSADOR TRAVELS TO SREBRENICA TO CALM
STORM OVER "SECESSION"

REF: A. SARAJEVO 686

[1](#)B. SARAJEVO 606

[1](#)C. SARAJEVO 579 AND PRIOR

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Classified By: Ambassador Douglas L. McElhaney for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Ambassador and embassy staff traveled to Srebrenica April 3 to meet with local citizens and to discuss possible improvements to living conditions for municipality residents. Srebrenica has been the subject of a Bosniak political movement for secession since the February ICJ verdict determined genocide had been committed there in 1995.

Based on conversations with local politicians, NGO representatives, returnees and youth, it is clear that the secession debate is increasingly divisive, pitting victims' families against the greater Srebrenica community. End Summary.

AMBASSADOR SPEAKS WITH SREBRENICA'S CITIZENS

[1](#)2. (U) Ambassador visited Srebrenica April 3 with USAID Director, Economic Counselor, Public Affairs Counselor and political staff. The Embassy delegation met with Srebrenica's Mayor Abduraham Malkic, Srebrenica Speaker Radomir Pavlovic, Srebrenica based municipal councilors - both Serb and Bosniak, a network of local NGO representatives, returnees and members of the Srebrenica Youth Council. Ambassador also gave an exclusive interview to the local newspaper "Zurnal" for a special edition covering his visit. (Note: Zurnal is the only regional newspaper with articles alternately printed in Latin and Cyrillic script and written by both Serb and Bosniak journalists. The Embassy's Democracy Commission has supported the paper, which is free and has a circulation of [1](#)4500. End Note.)

FAMILIES OF GENOCIDE VICTIMS DEMAND SECESSION FROM THE RS -
OTHERS WANT DIALOGUE ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC REFORMS

[1](#)3. (C) In their exchanges with Ambassador, NGO representatives, youth leaders and politicians emphasized their interest in addressing Srebrenica's current socio-economic problems, and stressed that dialogue was the best means of accomplishing this goal. They criticized threats for mass emigration if Srebrenica is not granted

special political status outside Republika Srpska. (Note: This is the same message these groups delivered to us during our visit on March 26. (Ref A) End Note.) Victims' family members, however, delivered a much angrier message.

¶4. (C) When the Ambassador made a private, unannounced visit to the Srebrenica - Potocari Cemetery and Memorial, mothers of Srebrenica victims arrived unexpectedly to protest his visit and the international community's acceptance of the ICJ verdict. At one point, the mothers blocked the entrance to the memorial, holding signs stating "McElhaney does not support victims of genocide - you are not welcome here!" Ambassador spoke with Srebrenica mother and member of the Initiative Board for Special Status Hatidza Mehmedovic indicating the past and present U.S. support for the victims and survivors of genocide. He also expressed his concern over the current situation in Srebrenica.

Comment: Bosniak politicians frequently manipulate and exploit the suffering of the mothers of Srebrenica victims, who lack a sophisticated understanding of Bosnia's criminal justice system let alone international jurisprudence. Though their pain and suffering is real and justified, this "spontaneous" protest was likely orchestrated by others. The mothers do not speak English, and we overheard several asking for translations of their English language signs. In addition, during the protest, a local embassy staff member overheard one of the mothers receiving instructions by phone. End Comment.

MAYOR EXPECTS PROGRESS BY APRIL 14

¶5. (C) In a meeting with members of the Srebrenica Municipal Council, Mayor Malkic reiterated that Srebrenica should receive special treatment by the Bosnian government and the international community because both have neglected to

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guarantee adequate living conditions in Srebrenica. Malkic also indicated his desire to "demystify" the special status debate. He emphasized that its origin dates to a 2002 proposal by the municipality to give Srebrenica special economic status. Glossing over the Srebrenica Municipal Council's March 24 resolution threatening secession, Malkic said that municipal councilors and entity officials must now come together to determine the parameters of special status. He hoped this would take place at the April 14 follow-up meeting hosted by the "Initiative Board for Srebrenica Special Status." (Ref C) Malkic invited the Ambassador to also attend the meeting. (Comment: Malkic continues to refer to special status in socio-economic terms, but other Bosniak councilors, families of genocide victims and some returnees define "special status" exclusively as secession from the RS. Despite Malkic's assertions, the Municipal Council's March 24 Resolution put territorial adjustments to Dayton, not socio-economic issues, front and center in the Srebrenica debate. End Comment.)

¶6. (SBU) Municipal Council Speaker Radomir Pavlovic (SNSD), who worked cooperatively with Malkic on the 2002 proposal, told us that Serbs generally support Malkic's socio-economic agenda. There are differences over a few technical details, but nothing serious, he added. (Note. Like all other Serb Councilors, Pavlovic walked out of the chamber when SDA, SDP and SBiH councilors put forward their secession resolution on March 24. (Ref A) End Note.) He complained that the March 24 resolution highlighted the dangers of "outvoting" (i.e. ethnically-based voting that deprives the minority of a voice) and suggests the council should be restructured to include an equal number of Bosniaks and Serbs. Pavlovic also mentioned he believes Srebrenica should have an international mediator to monitor how reform programs are implemented.

¶7. (C) Comment: The Srebrenica secession debate is increasingly divisive. It is clear, however, that as time passes and tensions have not calmed, moderate voices are

increasingly drowned out. Mayor Malkic may be the first victim of these escalating local tensions. The Mayor is having increasing difficulty bridging the gap between family members who demand secession and other members of the Srebrenica community (including Serbs) who are primarily concerned with socio-economic improvements in the municipality. The divide between the goals of these two groups widens as family members and those who support them become more insistent in their demand for secession. The mothers' protest is the first manifestation of family members' turning their anger over the ICJ verdict against the U.S. End Comment.

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